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ABSTRACT

A number of second language class activities are presented that stimulate interpersonal interaction and develop communication skills. The exercises are also designed to accommodate learners' different learning styles, pacing needs, skill levels, and course content. They include: a questionnaire activity in which students must discover facts about classmates; descriptions of drawings; picture completion using pairs or trios of students; and "matchmaking." Using individualized lesson plans and offering students a number of activity options from which to choose are also suggested. An individualized lesson plan form is appended. (MSE)

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INDIVIDUALISED LEARNING AND THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN THE LOTE CLASSROOM

ED 409 730

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ABSTRACT: The following article was presented at the 1993 in-service organised by the Catholic Education Office for LOTE teachers in the South Coast District. It presents suggestions for communication activities and for planning for individualised learning in the LOTE secondary school classroom.

Teachers are probably much more aware now of individual abilities, special needs, and differing learning styles than ever before. At the same time, we are struggling to re-write old programmes, to adapt available materials and to up-date our sometimes-reluctant selves as we strive for a truly communicative approach to language learning in our classrooms.

Of course there are many books available on the market which suggest a host of extremely useful classroom strategies which facilitate communication in the target language. Among these are: Games for Language Learning (Intext), Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom (Intext), and Keep Talking (Cambridge University Press), just to name a few.

But once having understood the basic premise underlying the communicative approach to language learning, i.e. that people do not communicate unless they need to, the teacher will quite quickly begin to see ways to create this need, ways which can be modified to suit the needs of the individual class or indeed individual students.

One of the first techniques which can be used successfully even at very elementary levels is the "questionnaire". Students are

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given a sheet printed in English with instructions to find out how many people in the class: are called Mary, have exactly one brother, live in _____, etc. The "rules of the game" are that only the target language can be used and students must interview one person at a time. The information sought can be varied, of course, to suit a particular learning content, be that vocabulary or structure oriented. Examples might include:

(vocabulary on clothing)	Find out how many students have more than 5 jumpers.
(vocabulary on foods)	Find out how many students like roast veal.
(use of reflexives)	Find out how many students get washed before they get dressed in the morning.
(use of past tense)	Find out how many students had breakfast this morning.

This exercise is only limited by the teacher's imagination.

Another type of activity which works very well to stimulate communication involves visual to verbal information exchange. This can take many different forms, but it is based on the fact that if a picture is worth a thousand words, then any attempt to get someone to reproduce a visual image will involve the use of at least that many! Simple examples might be clothing or house plans. Each student, having drawn the clothing s/he is going to wear on Saturday night for a party, or the plans of an ideal house, attempts to get a classmate to reproduce what s/he has drawn by describing it but without showing it to the partner. More advanced students might be able to deal with an abstract drawing which is more difficult to describe. These sorts of activities can be done in pairs or with one student in front of the class. They can be modified by permitting the

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partner who is drawing, or the class to ask questions, in the target language, of course.

A variant of this technique is pair or even triplet work with incomplete or differing pictures. The aim is for the group to be able to explain what is missing or different between the two or three related images without showing the images to each other. The artistic teacher can go to town drawing these pictures, but similar pictures cut out from a magazine will do as well.

Another activity which students find very amusing and which tends to stimulate a great deal of communication involves pretend "computer date" cards. Each card has the description of the personality and physical traits of a member of the opposite sex to the student, listing the individual's likes and dislikes, etc. The cards are dealt out to the students at random and they have to trade with each other in order to finally attain their "perfect match". They have to describe, cajole, persuade, and bargain in order to do this--and all in the target language.

These communciation-stimulation exercises can, of course, be varied according to the needs and abilities of the class. Interestingly the students themselves will often vary them automatically according to their own individual needs and abilities, the less able students seeking to obtain the information with rudimentary words and phrases while the more able students attempt more complex or more elegant structures.

Another technique to cater for the varying learning styles of students within a single class involves the use of individualized lesson plans. The teacher sets out in writing the concepts or skills which the students are expected to master through a particular unit of work. This unit of work may be identified with a chapter in a textbook or several textbooks, a computer programme, a film or a work of literature or it may be idenytified with a specific situation, vocabulary content or function of language. Whatever the "content" of the unit of work, the teacher lists for the student those concepts and/or skills which must be mastered, leaving room on the form for the student to tick when s/he feels s/he has done so. Room is also

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left for a classmate to confirm the mastery and then for the teacher to do so as well.

Along with what is "to be reviewed or learned", the teacher makes a list of suggested activites which the student may choose to do in order to facilitate the learning process. These activities should include all four macro-skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as catering for different learning styles. Some students learn better working on their own while others do better working in pairs or in groups. Some students are especially visually oriented, while others rely more on other senses. A variety of activities should be suggested for each "item" to be mastered so that students can choose those which best suit their individual learning style. Room is left on the form for students to suggest their own activities. The form is done out so that students can keep a record of the activities which they have done and how long they have spent on each activity. Space is provided for students to record the marks they subsequently receive on teacher assessments of the unit. Of course, these assessment results could be expressed in terms of a mark, a grade or a comment. At the end there is room for the student to evaluate his/her own work on the unit by commenting on what s/he found easy or difficult, what s/he needs to do more work on, what activities s/he found particularly useful, enjoyable, etc.

There are several advantages of the at least occasional use of such individualized lesson plans in the ordinary LOTE class. The quick students need not do all of the suggested activities. They can go at their own pace and make activities harder, more challenging or more creative and they have time to do extension work or special interest projects.

The slow students can go at their own pace. They can choose activities and deal with small "bits' of information at a time. Small successes built up the confidence of such students, and proceeding in this manner, it is easy to identify where a problem does lie.

All students seem to appreciate having a choice of activities and each can work according to her/his prefered learning style: in visual images or in words, alone or with friends, etc. Students are

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able to see the purpose of activities and most students can work better when they know why they are doing a particular task. Absentees know what work to prepare.

The teacher has time to work with individual students. It is very obvious when a student isn't working seriously. A quick look at his/her work diary will tell. Another advantage is that creative ideas for innovative and effective learning activities can be found not only in the professional literature but often they are produced by the students themselves.

CONCLUSION

It is well-known that the involved and motivated language learner who has something s/he wishes to communicate will be the most successful language learner. This article has suggested several strategies to enable the LOTE teacher to provide an environment conducive to such involvement and communication.

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• Time Allowance 2-3 wks.

INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING LESSON PLAN
SEMPRE AVANTI CH. 11

TO BE LEARNED:	Self	Friend	Teacher
Vocabulary			
general			
parts of body			
illnesses			
passato prossimo w/ essere			
passato prossimo w/ reflexives			
irregular adjectives & adverbs			
irreg. verbs: (pres.) **bere rimanere**			
TO REVIEW:			
passato prossimo w/ avere			
irreg. (pres.) **andare venire sapere fare bere**			
direct obj. pronouns			

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES: Date/Time

vocabulary:

- Listen to dialogue on cassette
- Do vocab. exercises in workbook
- Do listening skills ex. in W.B.
- Practise reading dialog w/ friend
- Oral practice of vocab. w/friend
- Play Simone dice with friends
- Written practise of vocab.
- Draw a person and label parts of body
- Play the remembering game:
  - Mi fa male la testa.
  - A Maria fa male la testa.
  - Mi fa male la pancia.
  - A Maria fa male la testa.
  - A Giovanni fa male la pancia.
  - Io ho mal di gola. ecc.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES: Date/Time

passato prossimo w/ essere or avere:

Written ex. in W.B.

Avanti Parliamo Cassette

Composition: Ieri e oggi,
Le mie vacanze,
Una gita che ho fatto, ecc.

Describe your day yesterday to a friend

Record your "speech" on cassette

Write about what you are doing today, have your friend do the same, switch papers and re-tell your friend's story in the past tense.

Draw cartoons of Giorgio's day and tell your friend the story (present tense). Have your friend re-tell the story in the past tense.

Questionnaire: Find out how many people in the class got up early yesterday, ate exactly one roll for breakfast, were late for school, etc.

Exam marks:

Listening _____
SPEAKING _____
Reading _____
Writing _____

Evaluation Comments _____
What I found easy, hard ...
What I need to work more on ...
Activities I particularly enjoyed ...

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